

Local Infrastructure: Pedestrian and Bicycle Trails

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

Recently we have noticed a growing number of bicycles and hikers on County Road 43. As residents of the North End along Lumpy Ridge, we quite often travel to and from the town along Devils Gulch Road. We are seeing bicycle tours riding the very narrow paved shoulders, dog walkers, and increasingly skateboarders. The route allows these recreational users to bypass the crowds downtown. The route does not lend itself well to sharing the road.

With this issue in mind we reached out to friends Amy and Todd Plummer. Amy is the President of the Estes Valley Recreation and Park District (EVRPD) Trails Committee, and Todd is heavily involved with the Estes Park Cycling Coalition (EPCC). They arrived armed with blueprints, spreadsheets, the substantial document Estes Valley Master Trails Plan and some local brews. We chatted about how far this plan has come, what is next on the plan, and the future of trail funding.

Page 9 of the finished plan states “A cornerstone of this Estes Valley Master Trails Plan is bringing together all the partners working on trails in the valley, and integration of other regional trails planning efforts such as the Rocky Mountain Greenway project, Boulder County Parks and Open Space Regional Mountain Master Trails Plan, and the Larimer County Open Lands Master Plan to ensure efficient connectivity and reduce duplication of effort.” Development of the plan was supported by a planning grant from Great Outdoors Colorado. The Master Trails Plan became part of the Estes Park comprehensive plan in December 2016.

Since the initial Open House for the plan August 12, 2015, many of the trails within town limits have been completed. According to Amy and Todd much credit for the recent trail development is due Greg Muhonen, Director of Public Works. Completed trails include the Lake Estes Trail, Fish Creek Trail, the sidewalk on Dry Gulch between Highway 34 and the town limits, and the sidewalk on MacGregor from Wonderview to the town limits. The Fall River Trail is an ongoing part of the Master Plan. One of a few remaining legs of the Fall River Trail will be completed along Fish Hatchery Road this fall.

According to Amy funding for trails has been a combination of Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grants, some of the property taxes collected through EVRPD, Town of EP 1A sales tax, Larimer County, and others. We encourage EVRPD to continue the pursuit of funds to use for our trails. As the Master Plan document details, benefits of trails include “public health, economic and transportation benefits, and even the effect on quality of life...”

The next leg of planned Estes Park trail falls under the Larimer County’s jurisdiction, under the name Estes Park Loop. This has no connection to that other Loop project, and we propose renaming the Estes Park Loop the North End Loop Trail to avoid future confusion. This will extend the trail already completed on MacGregor, with a soft surface trail starting at the Episcopal church, separated from the road and ending on Devils Gulch across from the Gem Lake Trailhead. The soft surface is a choice for cost savings but also for the varied type of user and the environmental impact on drainage. The design of the first mile to the Gem Lake Trailhead was funded by EVRPD in 2017 and revised in January 2020 with funds provided by the Cycling Coalition. Eventually trail will be completed on the entire loop from MacGregor, along Devils Gulch Road to H Bar G and Dry Gulch. We ask that EVRPD, Larimer County and Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) help make this first mile a reality soon and prioritize the entire

eleven miles of North End Loop Trail. Not only will this connect to the Gem Lake access to RMNP but will also connect the Town of Estes Park to the McGraw Ranch entry to the park.

We encourage the Town of Estes Park to install more sidewalks, possibly in conjunction with road maintenance and improvement projects. For example, we have just witnessed construction of curbs, drainage, and repaving on Big Horn Drive off MacGregor Avenue. No sidewalks were included in this project. Perhaps the pedestrian traffic in this area is light? But some other streets, like Virginia Drive and Big Horn between downtown and Wonderview would be great candidates for sidewalks at least on one side. This can regulate parking and enhance the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists. Trails also enhance property value. Homeowners can be happy about such projects in proximity to their land.

When looking at the priority list in the Estes Valley Master Trails Plan the Estes Park Loop (North End Loop Trail) is the next eleven miles of trail prioritized to be completed. On behalf of the numerous local and regional organizations and people who have committed time and resources to this project, and my wife Laura Davis and I, we encourage citizens and the readers of the Trail Gazette to email, talk to, and research the candidates for Larimer County Commissioner and EVRPD to understand their views on trails in the Estes Valley. We encourage you to vote for candidates who support these efforts. And we encourage you to get involved with the EVRPD Trails Committee and EPCC to help Todd and Amy continue this great work!

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